


## The Persistence of "Cathay" in World Literature

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**Eugene Eoyang,**

**"The Persistence of 'Cathay' in World Literature"**

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**Abstract:** In his article "The Persistence of 'Cathay' in World Literature" Eugene Eoyang argues that China has only recently begun to occupy a place in world literatures as evidenced by the absence of Chinese literature from the early editions of the widely adopted *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* and its token representations in subsequent editions. "Orientalized" images of China still persist partly stemming from the continuing currency of stereotyped images of the Chinese promoted by publishers, by Western Sinologists, and even by expatriate Chinese. A cottage industry has developed which privileges the study of images of China (however distorted and oversimplified) over the often more intractable and less exotic complexities of Chinese literature and Chinese reality.

## Eugene EOYANG

### The Persistence of 'Cathay' in World Literature

On the topic "China in World Literature" one would have to say at the outset that if we judge by the 1979 *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* (Mack, Knox, McGallard, Pasinetti, Hugo, Wellek, Douglas, Lawall), China did not exist in world literature. The anthology went through six editions and tens of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of copies representing the literatures of the world without including any text from Chinese literature. Let us examine the table of contents of the edition published in 1979 in which the editors congratulated themselves on producing the edition that is "the best, we think, to date" (xiii). Of the twenty-eight authors included in volume two — which covered "Masterpieces of Neoclassicism" and the "Masterpieces of Romanticism" — none were Chinese. One might agree that once one defined periods with these Eurocentric period titles, the admission of a Chinese author or a Chinese work was far from obvious. The fault lies in precisely choosing non-universal historical designations. Not every culture in the world had a neoclassic period followed by a Romantic period. Nor do Enlightenment writers in the rest of the world appear in the eighteenth century and "high modernism" may not always follow an expansionist imperialist phase in cultures outside the West. This myopia can be understood (if not forgiven) if one recognizes the essential bias in selecting according to historical eras as they are defined in the West. Even the historical categories of volume one — the ancient world, the middle ages, the Renaissance — scarcely accommodate cultures other than the Western. The so-called "middle ages" in the West, for example, spanning roughly from the fifth to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, were for China far from being the "dark ages" that the medieval period conjures up in the West. In the poetry of the Tang Dynasty (7-10 centuries), in the lyric of the Song Dynasty (10-13 centuries), in the drama of the Yuan Dynasty (13-14 centuries), Chinese literature could be said to have produced masterpieces. And as for the "Renaissance," one would be hard put to designate any period of Chinese literature as a "renaissance" since Chinese literature never entered into a torpor — like the Dark Ages in the West — from which it awakened. There was a movement during the Tang Dynasty which was labeled 復古 ("return to the ancients") and that shared with the Renaissance in the West an emphasis on a classical past, but did not prompt — as the Renaissance did in the West — the burgeoning of modern science and technology. However, such "modern" technologies as paper currency, the compass, and moveable type did appear in China, but at a later period: the Song Dynasty.

What Western periodization represents, of course, is the erroneous assumption by its editors that the history of the West was, indeed, the history of the world (on periodization see, e.g., Damrosch, "World Literatures" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/3>>; Orr <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1254>>; Sucur). This may appear an overly broad criticism, but for the fact that the editors — after congratulating themselves on producing the best edition of the anthology "to date" — go on to state in the first sentence of the preface and with a blitheness that would be breathtaking if it were not so authoritatively declared that "World Masterpieces is an anthology of Western literature" (xvii). This statement is certainly accurate: the anthology includes nothing but Western literature. But the guileless unawareness of the statement reflect a total ignorance on the part of the editors that there might be a slight impropriety in equating the West with the World. In the preface, the Norton editors justify their practice with the following rationale: "The Literature of the Far East have been omitted, on the ground that the principal aim of a course on world literature is to bring American students into living contact with their own Western tradition, and that this aim cannot be adequately realized in a single course if they must also be introduced to a very different tradition, one requiring extended treatment to be correctly understood" (xvii). What the rationale defends relates to limitations of time and background on the part of the students, but it offers no justification for equating "the Western tradition" with "the world." Nor was this rationale cited when subsequent editions did include selections from the literatures of the "Far East." Further, although not anthologies, the 2012 *The Routledge Companion to World Literature* (D'haen, Damrosch, Kadir) or the 2009 *Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present* (Damrosch, Melas, Buthelezi) include meager work about Chinese-language literature and the *Princeton Sourcebook's* one article on Chinese literature is the re-publication of an

article first published in 2000 in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>> (see Zhou and Tong <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1092>>, see same article also in the 2003 volume *Comparative Literature and Comparative Cultural Studies*; on comparative literature in Chinese, see also Wang and Liu). I find it curious that the editors were not able to find a newer text. However, I should note that that "lesser" anthologies were not as Eurocentric: for example, the anthology *The World in Literature* (Anderson, Kumler, Warnock) published in 1950 began with selections from Chinese literature. Although not an anthology, the 2013 volume *Companion to Comparative Literature, World Literatures, and Comparative Cultural Studies* includes a good number of references and substantial articles about Chinese-language literature (see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Mukherjee; on comparative literature in Chinese, see also Wang, Miaomiao <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/17>>; for a recent study on anthologies of European literatures specifically see Domínguez).

There is a model of Westernization as the only way to modernize and this confuses the issue. The whole notion of developed and developing countries embodies implicitly the assumption that the West is the apex of development, certainly as far as technology is concerned. Few if any can conceive of modernization without Westernization. The consequences of this impression is that one must accept the historical development of the West as paradigmatic for all cultures. It also implies that the East is backward when compared to the West (the euphemism is "developing"). The prevailing view of Western history provides a template whether we are aware of it or not of the way we assume that all cultures develop. This is why the divisions in the Norton anthologies were so restrictive and so ill-suited in accommodating works outside the Western tradition.

In the sixth edition of the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* published in 1995 (Mack, Knox, McGalliard, Pasinetti, Hugo, Spacks, Wellek, Douglas, Lawall), there was a glimmer of recognition that there were significant literary works which appeared outside of the West and one discovers the isolated inclusion of an excerpt from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in the Table of Contents: it could be argued that this is not an exception to Western hegemony, because in the eyes of many *Things Fall Apart* is a Western work written by an Anglophone Nigerian. In the preface, we read the following: "A word now about the future. At thirty five, this anthology is in the prime of life and burning for a new adventure. Those of you who noticed that our Fifth Edition had selections from Africa, Japan, and India, and that this Sixth Edition opens with an epic from the ancient Middle East and closes with a great novel from modern Africa" (xviii). Note that there is no word about China and note the self-congratulatory tone in embarking on an "adventure" (as if the neglect of the non-Western world in the earlier editions were somehow inevitable and justified). This implies an attitude that tries to justify ethnocentricity and that we should neglect cultures and literatures because we do not know enough about them. There is, furthermore, a conventional ethnocentricity, nay, Eurocentricity, in this "brave new" preface: the reference to "the ancient Middle East" seems so conventional that one could hardly cavil at its use, but the "Middle East" bespeaks a uniquely European reference point since the "Middle" in "Middle East" is by contrast to the Far East and the Levant is "middle" only from a starting point of Europe. For the United States, the Middle East is further than the "Far East." There is nothing inherently "Middle" about the "Middle East" (the United Nations uses Western Asia).

In the early 1990s, Norton consulted me on preparing a selection of Chinese texts to be included in a third volume — to be added to volume one on the Ancient World, the Middle Ages, and volume two on neoclassicism and Romanticism. I declined on the grounds that stuffing all non-Western masterpieces into a third, separate volume would be tantamount to adding a caboose to a train, an afterthought to the "Twentieth Century Limited" that was/is Western literature. Unless works from outside the West could be incorporated historically in the earlier volumes, any tacked-on volume that included entire cultures which had been neglected up to then would reinforce the provinciality of the earlier editions and would marginalize non-Western masterpieces. Needless to say, my consultancy ended with that conversation. Since the 1990s things have improved to some degree. Not only did Norton produce an expanded edition in 1995 (Mack, Bierhorst, Clinton, Danly, Douglas, Hugo, Irele, Knox, Lawall, McGalliard, Miller, Owen, Pasinetti, Peterson, Spacks, Wellek) which integrated Western and non-Western literatures, but competing compilations appeared such as *The HarperCollins World Reader* (Caws and Prendergast) published in two volumes in 1995: volume one covered the period

from "Antiquity to the early modern world" and volume two was labeled simply "The Modern Period" (note the omission of the Eurocentric "Medieval"; the requirement of transparency obliges me to disclose that I was responsible for the inclusions of Chinese literature in the *World Reader*).

With the advent of the expanded edition of the *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* in 1995, China took a prominent place. The "Poetry and Thought in Early China" took its rightful place among the classics of the ancient world: the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Bible*, Homer, and the Greek tragedies. Included now in *World Masterpieces* were selections from the 詩經 (*The Book of Songs*) and Confucius even from the 九歌 (*The Nine Songs*). And the second volume began with a generous helping of Chinese vernacular fiction (perhaps labeled oxymoronically "vernacular literature"): excerpts from the 西遊記 (*The Journey to the West* which Arthur Waley titled *Monkey*), 桃花扇 (*The Peach Blossom Fan*) — which was, strictly speaking, literary and not vernacular drama — and the 紅樓夢 (*The Dream of the Red Chamber*), which is both vernacular and literary. However, in the last section entitled "The Modern Period: Self and Other in Global Context" there are sixty authors represented including five Japanese while Chinese literature is represented by only one author: 魯迅 (Lu Xun). This reflects an image of Chinese literature that seems to be worthy of attention during ancient and traditional times, but of little or no consequence in the modern period. The general neglect extends to contemporary Chinese literature, which still holds the stigma of the propagandistic literary productions that flourished in the first thirty years of communist China (see, e.g., Yang <[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-08/30/content\\_11221972.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-08/30/content_11221972.htm)>).

In the preface to both volumes we encounter the oft-repeated query whose fatuousness has eluded generations of Western Sinologists: "Why has the Chinese outlook and experience led to some of the world's finest songs and lyrics but never to an epic poem?" (xxvi). There are several problems with this formulation. The first is its one-sidedness: why, if it is meaningful to ask why China did not produce an epic poem, is one not curious why the West did not produce "絕句" ("Quatrain"), the four-line poem of five or seven words popular during the Tang Dynasty or why the West did not produce the *haiku*, the seventeen syllable poem popular in Japanese literature? The second problem with the formulation is its assumption of completeness: the implication is that if China did not produce an epic poem, it is somehow less adequate than the West. And the third problem is the ethnocentricity of the formulation: as the epic is the most admired genre in Western literature from Homer to Virgil to Dante to Milton, the absence of an epic in Chinese literature is implicitly assumed to be a reflection of its superficiality, a lack of gravitas. The underlying problem of such formulations is the self-referential bias implicit in these queries: why is not the Other, the questioner seems to be asking, more like the Self? This would be harmless if the question did not import surreptitiously a notion that the Self is superior to the Other. What is comprehensible and not to be questioned is when the Other resembles the Self, but what is incomprehensible is when the Other differs inexplicably from the Self.

One is reminded of early US-American tourists to China who were appalled by the lack of sanitation, the abject poverty in some areas, the inconvenience (for Westerners who do not speak Chinese), and return with a decidedly negative image of China because it is not like the United States. What these tourists have seen is that China is not the United States, but what they have not seen is what China is however it compares to the U.S. Of course, as China becomes more Westernized and more modern, fewer US-American tourists are appalled by what they see there: they are amused and reassured to find Kentucky Fried Chicken and MacDonald's dotting the Chinese landscape. This merely reinforces the ethnocentricity of their perspective which privileges a likeness to U.S. culture as a basis for a positive judgment on a foreign culture. Other cultures cannot be understood merely as an index of their differences from Western culture: unless one understands a different culture on its own terms, based on its values (which may differ from the fundamental values of Western civilization), they cannot be understood at all. This phenomenon may be seen in the missionary experience in China in the nineteenth century, when the Chinese were viewed as heathens, as non-Christians, rather than as polytheistic and syncretic devotees — concurrently — of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism.

The ethnocentricity of the West is nowise more apparent than in the widespread use of the term, "non-Western," which reflects a concept of the self and the world as "the West" and "the Rest" and emphasizes the distinction of what is "West" and what is not "West." But to define something by what it is not is not to see the thing for itself. The phrase "non-Western" assumes: 1) that "Western" as a term is unambiguous and determinate and 2) that the term designates adequately "other" cultures.



What it designates is the perspective that equates cultures outside the West with being unknown and that their most salient trait is that they are not "Western." But Asians and Africans do not conceive of themselves as "non-Western." In fact, one could argue that the term "non-Western" points to a null-category, a term that "non-Westerners" would not recognize as a category which includes them (the term "Third World" is a slightly less ethnocentric appellation). While there are many words for "foreign" in Asian languages, I am not aware of any widespread use of the word "non-Asian" and what is used is a translation of "Western," which is Western self-designation. The Chinese do have a term 蛮夷 ("non-Han"): it does not refer to the cultures outside of China, but to the Indigenous people in China not of the Han ethnic group. A more balanced perspective is offered by David Damrosch: "If we read a foreign text in ignorance of its author's assumptions and values, we risk reducing it to a pallid version of some literary form we already know, as though Homer had really wanted to write novels but couldn't quite handle character development, or as though Japanese *haiku* are would-be sonnets that run out of steam after seventeen syllables" (1; for a contrary view, see, e.g., Fehskens <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss6/13>>).

There is an assumption that any cross-cultural comparison is *ipso facto* cosmopolitan in perspective, but as my examples show, comparisons can be invidious and privilege implicitly the host perspective over what is remote and unfamiliar. In English-language anthologies of literature in the case of China it was not until the last decade of the twentieth century before its literature was adequately represented: before then it was either totally neglected or was represented by a token entry or two. My survey of excerpts in anthologies of world literatures does not expose the true provinciality of the West's acquaintance with Chinese literature, because what is rarely, if ever, mentioned is that the two most prominent and prolific translators of Chinese poetry in the twentieth century — Ezra Pound and Arthur Waley — did not speak Chinese. Pound knew no Chinese when he published *Cathay: Translations by Ezra Pound* in 1915, although he studied Chinese before he published his *Selected Poems* including Confucian odes in 1949 and he never visited China and was not conversant in Chinese. Waley, despite his voluminous translations from the Chinese also never visited China: he was invited in the 1960s shortly before his death in 1966. His response was that he had no desire to visit modern China, since it did not represent the classical China he studied and read about. Denis Sinor, who knew Waley, and attended to him in his last days, confirms the fact that Waley did not speak Chinese (personal communication).

There is no proper word corresponding to "illiterate" for the inability to speak a language. With most phonetic languages, it is assumed that the ability to read entails the ability to speak. Even in phonetic languages the relationships between the spoken word and the written word are not always reliable or accurate. Different phonetic languages have different degrees of fidelity in the phoneticization of the spoken tongue in the written language. English is notoriously unreliable in this regard: the transcript in transliterated letters of spoken English is often misleading. Twentieth-century translators of Chinese, indeed, many professors of Sinology in the West, were adept at reading a text in Chinese, but were thoroughly incapable of speaking fluent Chinese. For English-speaking scholars, this presented no impediment, since communist China was to all intents and purposes cut off from the West for a generation from 1949 to 1979.

The English language, like most languages, betrays a native bias that takes the oral for granted. While there is a word "literate" for those who can read and "illiterate" for those who cannot read there is no exact counterpart for the ability to speak a language ("proficient") and the inability to speak ("unproficient," "not proficient," "im-oral"?). With a medium as profoundly oral as poetry, a translator should at least be able to hear the rhythms of an oral rendition. That the primary translators of Chinese poetry in the twentieth century had, literally, no "ear" for Chinese poetry as it was recited, chanted, or sung is a matter of no small consequence for the image of Chinese poetry in English. That is why Pound's inspired recreations of classical Chinese poems — two that come to mind are Li Bai's "長干行" which Pound translated as "The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" and his "玉階怨" which Pound rendered as "The Jeweled Stairs' Grievance") — are remarkable for someone who was not proficient in Chinese. As far as Chinese goes, it might be said that Pound — and Waley — were "im-oral." Which is why after over a century of having translations of Chinese poetry available in English, English speakers' knowledge of Chinese literature remains paltry. The appreciation of Chinese poetry seems to have peaked — if not frozen — in 1915 with the miraculous renditions of traditional Chinese verse by

Pound. He was never again to achieve the heights of literary translation he managed in the fifteen translations of classical Chinese poems in *Cathay*, although thirty-four years later he attempted to render the 305 poems in the 詩經 (*The Book of Songs*) with results which are at best mixed. In the nearly 100 years since *Cathay*, scholars have paid perhaps more attention to Pound's version of China than to China itself. This was inevitable during the thirty years (1949-1979) when communist China closed itself off to the outside world. Sinology became a shadow dance where "Chinese Shadows" were studied, rather than the actual China itself. *Chinese Shadows* became the title of a popular book published in 1976 by Simon Leys (pseudonym of Pierre Ryckmans), a scholar who taught both at the Australian National University (where he served as the advisor to a Ph.D dissertation of Kevin Rudd, who would become prime minister of Australia) and at the University of Sydney. But even with the opening of China and the enhanced opportunities for Westerners to visit and learn about China, the resort to China as a source of mystery and myth remains.

The image of China is easier to exploit than the realities of China. I believe some of this exploitation comes from individual Chinese who emigrated to the West. In *The Promise and Premise of Creativity: Why Comparative Literature Matters* I wrote about 哈金 (Ha Jin), the popular Chinese novelist who writes and publishes in English (61-63). Skilled as he is and admired as he is, he is not above casting his characters anachronistically in a stereotyped mold. In *Waiting*, a novel about a contemporary Chinese trying to divorce a conservative wife in order to marry another woman, Ha gives the wife bound feet to highlight her reactionary ways, despite the fact that bound feet were outlawed in China half a century before she was born. I also explored the "exoticizations" of China and of Chinese poetry which can be found in the work of as knowledgeable and as authentic exponent of China as Cheng (72-83). Nor is the distortion of Chinese literature to be found only in Chinese expatriates eager to assimilate to an adopted Western culture. Non-native scholars have dwelled excessively on "the enduring mystery" of China (in another era, the cliché was "inscrutability") and on defining the essential "Chineseness" of a text or translation. Perhaps the most controversial illustration of this phenomenon is the unfortunate flap occasioned by the prolific translator of classical Chinese poetry, Stephen Owen, when he was asked — inappropriately, given the abyss between scholars of traditional and modern China — to comment on contemporary poetry in China. In "What Is World Poetry" Owen addressed the issue of writing for one's native culture and writing for a world audience. His discussion of this point is worth quoting, especially since the latter part of his study, mired in controversy, has attracted a disproportionate amount of attention:

The need to have one's work approved in translation creates, in turn, a pressure for an increasing fungibility of words. Yet poetry has traditionally been built of words with a particular history of usage in a single language — of words that cannot be exchanged for other words. Poets who write in the "wrong language" (even exceedingly populous wrong languages, like Chinese) not only must imagine themselves being translated in order to reach an audience of a satisfying magnitude, they must also engage in the peculiar act of imagining a world poetry and placing themselves within it. And, although it is supposedly free of all local literary history, this "world poetry" turns out, unsurprisingly, to be a version of Anglo-American modernism or French modernism, depending on which wave of colonial culture first washed over the intellectuals of the country in question, this situation is the quintessence of cultural hegemony, when an essentially local tradition (Anglo-European) is widely taken for granted as universal. (28)

Owen was prophetic in his anticipation of a Chinese author who would be knowledgeable about modernism and who would reach a world audience (on Owen's work, see, e.g., Li and Guo <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2175>>). Ten years later, in 2000, Xingjian Gao — an unabashed product of French modernism — won the Nobel Prize for Literature as a French citizen and it is ironic that Gao's compatriots in China have deplored the award on the same basis as Owen outlined in 1990; on Gao see, e.g., Lee, "Aesthetics" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2056>>, "The Motif"). Owen's otherwise excellent point above is vitiated by three subtle misrepresentations: the first is the reference to "an increasing fungibility of words": although it is fashionable in our semi-literate age to denigrate best-sellers which cater to a less than literary clientele, as a point of aesthetics the commercial success of a work is not always inimical to its literary value. In their own day, both Shakespeare and Dickens trafficked in "the fungibility of words." The second misrepresentation involves the indisputable assertion that literature is comprised "of words that cannot be exchanged for other words." But Owen assumes an interlingual perspective and speaks

about the impropriety of writing "for translation." Yet, if it is true that literature involves the use of words which cannot be exchanged for other words, it is true not merely for translation: it remains also true within the same language. Translation has nothing to do with the essential ineluctability of words in literature. The third distortion is the fixed notion of the local and universal as if the local could not be universal or oriented outward. Dostoyevsky is a distinctly "Russian" author, but his indebtedness to Dickens and the French realists is unquestioned and he was, by the way, also motivated by "the fungibility of words" in his writing (see Catteau 149-50). One could also cite Chaucer who borrowed heavily from continental European authors, especially those from France and Italy, yet who would deny the essential "localness," the preternatural Englishness of *The Canterbury Tales*. My point is — against Owen's US-American ethnocentricity when he asks, derisively, "Who now reads Tagore?" (30) — that the answer is: almost all Indians and Bengalis do.

Although Owen praises isolated passages from 北島 (Bei Dao), in the end he denigrates his work with the argument that his poetry is written for the Western consumer of literature and is insufficiently "local," i.e., Chinese. This position has been criticized in many quarters as revealing more about Owen's possessiveness of a (traditional) "China" of which he is, presumably, the custodian. In Lisa Lai-ming Wong's words summarizing Michelle Yeh's and Rey Chow's critique of Owen's article: "From these critics' points of view, Owen's essentialist notion of 'Chineseness' in poetry is common in Westerners' Orientalist biases, which imprison 'the other' in the static past" ("The Making" 130; see also Wong, "Taiwan" <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1292>>). Evidently, the postcolonial injunction against essentializing cultures, especially other cultures, does not apply to China. There is, to my mind, an unfortunate thirst among US-American readers and scholars for exotica even if it is factitious or false: the imitation Ming vase instead of contemporary porcelain, *ersatz* classical poetry rather than contemporary free verse in Chinese, a "pure Chineseness" rather than the amalgam of cultures contemporary China has become. Better a story about a conservative woman who had her feet bound — as I am stating above half a century after the practice was outlawed in China — than the rapacious young ladies shaking down their Western expatriate bosses with sexual imbroglios and the threat of exposure. Better a heroine of the Cultural Revolution suffering in the national insanity than the China today which is the fastest growing market for cars where a significant number of car buyers do not even know how to drive. The image of the materialistic, capitalist, bourgeois communist Chinese today is too complicated to depict: better to revert to tried and true stereotypes — the taste for which is, apparently, well nigh inexhaustible. The search for the essential Chinese sells, the depiction of the actual reality complex and unfocused as it might be does not.

Unfortunately, some Chinese attitudes toward the West only reinforce East-West antinomies. In China the West and "Westernizations" are sometimes demonized as inauthentic. The case of Nobel Laureate Gao is an interesting example of Chinese negativism towards the West: as a French citizen of Chinese descent he is admired by some in the West for his familiarity with French culture while he is vilified in China for not being sufficiently and authentically "Chinese," but overly Westernized. China's stereotypes are, in the words of Eric Hayot, "tantalizing": "China — mysterious, irrational, evocatively provocative — beguiles" (viii). There is an insatiable audience more willing to be beguiled than to be informed. Hayot is clever in setting the parameters of his study by deconstructing the whole idea of illusion. In commenting on T.S. Eliot's claim that Pound was the "inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" (xiv) and on Xiaomei Chen's notion that cross-cultural misunderstanding is a form of understanding (83), Hayot offers a philosophical palimpsest where assertion can be written over erasure and illusion becomes merely the mask of truth, what Hayot calls "an ontological complication": "Unlike an illusion, and unlike a thing that is not at all an illusion, an 'illusion that is not altogether an illusion' [the phrase is Eliot's] lives and breathes somewhere between the matter as we know it and the matter as such. It is real and unreal at the same time, like a dream" (11; for Hayot, "misunderstanding" means a view of a text or a cultural event by a "receiver" community which differs in important ways from the view of the same text or event in the community of its "origin" [10]).

This enables Hayot to inoculate himself against the virus of "Orientalism": "This ontological complication suggests at least one way out of the apparent bind or orientalism, a way to acknowledge that a representation can be a truth and a lie at the same time" (11). Along with many others, I share Hayot's admiration for Pound's *Cathay* when Hayot writes that "one of Cathay's great successes is that it managed to translate in a manner that seemed entirely culturally authentic — this despite Pound's



absolute ignorance of Chinese. But then knowledge of a certain kind can only get in the way of translation. As another early reviewer of *Cathay* remarked, it was hard to know if Pound had actually translated from the Chinese. But maybe that made no difference: 'for those who, like ourselves, know no Chinese, it does not matter much. The result, however produced, is well worth having, and it seems to us very Chinese'" (144). It is true that the way Pound translated seems "entirely culturally authentic" (Hayot 20), but I cannot agree with Hayot when he says that "knowledge of a certain kind can only get in the way of translation" (21). It is casuistry to suggest that ignorance is always a solid basis for inspiration. And I also cannot agree that it makes no difference whether one knows or does not know if "Pound had actually translated from the Chinese." I agree that "the result, is well worth having" and it may seem "very Chinese" to the reader who cannot read Chinese. But there is a difference, even a crucial difference, between "is" and "seem" and to be indifferent to that difference is to accept an ethos of stereotyping as true knowledge. There is a difference between Cheng's *la grande passion* and Du Mu's 多情 ("deep feelings").

Next, I take a brief excursion illustrating the above lacunae of Chinese literature in anthologies of literature and what this signifies with regard to Western exceptionalism. My example is scholarship and what we call "knowledge management" today. There is an unwritten rule that the discourse of international conferences must be in English and this is sometimes justified by the conviction that "English is the world's language." This statement, widely cited, is, however, not strictly true. First, as one Japanese businessman observed, "It is broken English that is the world's language." Which points out one of the unintended consequences of the use of English at international conferences: those whose native language is not English are disadvantaged in presenting their research at international conferences (on an alternative view with regard to English, see, e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1041>>; Wang, Ning, "On World Literatures" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol15/iss5/4>>). The result is that scholars who may be brilliant in their fields and impressive in their own language must come across in (broken) English as inarticulate and unintelligent (the shibboleth of ignorant US-Americans reflects this as "If you're so smart, why don't you speak English?"). The logical inference here is obnoxious: unless one presents oneself well in English at international conferences, the assumption is that one cannot be intelligent (this phenomenon is less pronounced in the sciences, where the insights offered involve mathematical expressions and formulae which do not require fluency in English to comprehend). If languages are, as many maintain, not equivalent semantically or gesturally, the exclusive use of English narrows the scope of discourse and precludes insights more accessible in other languages. George Steiner put it this way: "Each and every window in the house of languages opens on to a different landscape and temporality, to a different spectrum of perceived and classified experience" (10). The reliance at international conferences on English exclusively impoverishes the nature of discourse, and compromises the quality of intellectual exchange.

There is a second reason why the "English is the world's language" mantra is wrong, if not misleading. While it may not be true that English is the world's language, it is true that English is the world's second language. More people speak or use English as a second language today than any other. I repeat: the requirement that English be used at international conferences means that local researchers who wish to report on their research cannot use their own language to present their results. The injunction results in an injustice as well as an impropriety. Only those who are proficient in English are allowed to be comfortable with the medium of presentation at international conferences. Given modern technology, however, it is possible to offer concurrent alternatives to an audience with different language competencies. I discount simultaneous translation because it is impractical and difficult and because the necessary qualified personnel may not always be available at conference venues and also discount consecutive interpretation because it is time consuming and arduous for presentation: it is inefficient for the monolingual audience for whom half the presentation is incomprehensible and tedious for the bilingual audience because it presents everything twice. What I propose, at least for plenary presentations, is that the speaker should be allowed to use whatever language she/he is most comfortable in as long as she/he provides the conference with a translation in English that can be projected on a screen concurrently with the presentation so that the audience can understand the proceedings either aurally (if they understand the language the speaker is using) or visually (by reading the English translation as the speaker is making his/her presentation: the practice

is akin to the widespread use of "super titles" at operas). The bilingual audience can choose either to hear or to read the presentation. Depending on the resources of the conference organizers or the speaker, the reverse can also be arranged: translations of plenary presentations into the local language projected on the screen while the speaker makes his/her presentation in English. In other words, one exploits the fact that English is the world's second language more likely than any other to provide the broadest possible access for presentations in different languages. With the emergence of China and its massive population and the growing interest in the language around the world, it may not be too far off when speakers of English who have not studied Chinese may be grateful for access through the world's second language to a translation of the proceedings that one can read while the presentation is being made in Chinese.

In conclusion, my argument is that China in the twenty-first century is a major economic and political power. Its culture and its literature is among the oldest in the world and warrants serious attention not as a marginal and exotic outlier in the literatures of the world, but as central to a significant portion of the human population. China and the Chinese cannot be dismissed as merely "mysterious" or "inscrutable," its paradigms, especially when they differ from those in the West, need to be understood, because they determine much of the thinking of a quarter of the world's population. Its literature must be studied for its own sake, not merely as a counterpart to the West, and certainly not as a stereotype, but in all its complexity and contradictoriness. And the same argument applies to "knowledge management" in scholarship and its corollary, namely the question of language at conferences where knowledge is presented and discussed. Part of the problem stems from ethno- and Euro-US-American centrality of using "the world's language" exclusively at international conferences: we deprive ourselves of perspectives and logics which may be difficult to negotiate in English. If "world literature(s)" is/are to mean anything, China must be included even in translation as problematic and as misleading as that might be. There are some who believe that by the end of the twentieth century, Chinese might replace English as the world's language. This may or may not come true, but there are certainly more Native speakers of Chinese than of any other language and Chinese is becoming more and more popular as a second language particularly among the legion of Western entrepreneurs who flock to China to conduct business. It is time to study China, not 'Cathay.'

Note: The above article is revised and updated version excerpted from Eoyang, Eugene. *Promises and Premises of Creativity: Why Comparative Literature Matters*. London: Continuum, 2012. Copyright release to the author.

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